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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7279
RHEHWSR/WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM WASHINGTON DC//NSC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003726

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2016

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SUBJECT: IRAQI MINISTER DISCUSSES MILITIA DISARMAMENT AND REGION FORMATION

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: According to Shiite State Minister Safa a-Safi, the GOI's point person for drafting a militia disarmament plan, the definition of "militia" will be crucial. Al-Safi links progress on the militia issue to political will on all sides - but he shows signs of sectarian bias. END SUMMARY

Drafting a Plan, Hoping for Mutual Trust

¶2. (C) Minister of State for Council of Representatives Affairs (CoR) Safa al-Safi told the Ambassador October 3 that he is the Prime Minister's point person on drafting a militia Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) plan. Safi agreed with that the reintegration portion is the most important part and welcomed USG assistance and proposals. He will spend the next couple of weeks studying the DDR issue before discussing it with all sides. He stated that defining "militia" is crucial, particularly with some groups proclaiming they are not militias.

¶3. (C) The Minister said there is no need for a new law on militias or DDR since the existing statutes already forbid militias. Rather, Iraq needs a plan and instructions. He also expressed doubt that a plan could be presented before December, saying progress depends on the attitudes of political leaders and militias. He highlighted the importance of building trust between the parties, adding that if there was no fear, there would be no militias.

Sectarian Bias Shows

¶4. (C) However, the Shiite Minister shows signs of sectarian bias. Al-Safi referred to Sunni statements as "provocative," while referring to Shia Islam as a "religion of peace" and Shias as "oppressed." He frequently described militias as protecting the people from takfiris (those who proclaim others to be infidels), and noted that militias could be looked at as a legitimate means of security. The Ambassador replied that the security institutions of the state need to play a neutral role and militia elements need to be removed from these institutions. The Minister agreed with this statement.

Region Formation Law

¶5. (C) The Minister acknowledged that he was the principal drafter of the Shia Coalition version of the region formation law. He said there are currently some different points of

view on the draft law, as well as constitutional issues. As an example, he claimed the Fadhila idea to limit regions to one governorate is a violation of Article 119 of the constitution, which gives governorates the right to form regions. He added that those who oppose the draft law are afraid of federalism. He stated that, in reality, economic integration between governorates will likely occur before administrative integration and region formation.

KHALILZAD